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DECORATION FROM LOUIS XV
TO OUR DAY

ON April 21 there will be opened in the Print Galleries an exhibition of "ornament," containing both engravings and a few drawings made for the use of craftsmen, which will be illustrated by a number of objects showing the manner in which the motifs and the designs of the draughtsmen were applied in the shops. In view of the fact that the exhibition, while containing many charming and important originals, is educational in intent, it has been thought wise to include a number of facsimiles of prints and drawings which themselves are not available. Thanks are due to the Misses Hewitt, to Ogden Codman, Lloyd Warren, Whitney Warren, and Paul J. Sachs, to the Museum for the Arts of Decoration of Cooper Union and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, who have lent many extremely interesting and valuable items and have by their generosity made the exhibition possible. All the drawings and objects, and the greater number of the prints, come from the collection of the Museum itself.

As there have been several articles in recent numbers of the BULLETIN upon this topic, it is doubtless not necessary to repeat the arguments there advanced concerning the great importance of the study of ornament. Perhaps, however, an attempt to find the reasons for at least one of the greatest differences between the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century attitude toward ornament and the attitude of the present day may be worth while. No claim is made that the theory advanced is more than a theory. The documents in the case are so vast in extent that no one short of many years' arduous work can be familiar with them; for a large part of the story, possibly its most important part, no adequate digests of the facts as yet have been made. Admittedly faulty, if the argument, such as it is, can start discussion and thought, it will have fulfilled its purpose.

Today in common parlance "decoration" and "ornament" in the various styles, Regency or Adam, for instance,

are chiefly thought of in connection with "period rooms" and "period furniture," which mean rooms and furniture of any period except our own. The "period room" in the museum or in the house of the collector is a place where genuine objects of a certain period are brought together in order that, being seen with and among other objects made at the same time and under the same influences, they may have their proper value. But the "period room" in its ordinary condition is something talked of in the magazines devoted to household furnishing, something made to satisfy a timid taste on the part of its possessor, and, so far from being typical of what was meant by "decoration" and "ornament" by the men of the period in question, stands at its very antipodes; for the underlying spirit of the real and that of the modern adaptation are fundamentally different. In view of the great mass of "period furniture" that is being turned out by our manufacturers and its disappearance into our houses, it is important that this difference should be understood.

Until the beginning of the last century the great palaces and mansions were planned and carried out pursuant to the given style of decoration in vogue at the time of their erection, such period rooms as were to be found in them but the normal result of the changes that time brought about in the interiors and the exteriors of houses lived in during succeeding generations. When a new wing was erected, it was furnished naturally in the prevailing taste of the day; when a room or a suite was altered or refurnished for any reason, it was done over in the then contemporary style. People believed in themselves and in their styles—had complete confidence in them, and did not hesitate to break with the past, to put a contemporary room in the middle of many old-fashioned ones. This self-confidence brought it about that when rooms and apartments of different periods were found in a great house a visitor could tell within a few years just when each of them had last been done over. But today all this is changed. A house so new that the plaster is still damp in its walls will have its period rooms, either

all in the fashion of some one long-dead time, or in the fashion of several wholly distinct, not to say antagonistic, styles. When rooms or apartments are done over, the chances are more than even that the new work done will be in the style of some period at least a century earlier than that in which the rest of the house is conceived. Where the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries looked forward, we look backward, and somehow, but quite logically nevertheless, the effect is not the same.

In England in the later years of the eighteenth century two new departures were attempted in decoration, one Gothic and the other antique, the latter of which will be talked of in its place. A few rich men, Horatio Walpoles and "Vathek" Beckfords, out of sheer perversity built themselves what they called "Gothic" houses. But they were not Gothic, not even imitations of it, only fantastical nonsense, Beckford's tower at Fonthill so flimsy in construction that, unless memory plays false, it tumbled down one day when the wind blew. Some of the furniture designers, Manwaring and Chippendale, produced patterns for "Gothic" furniture, but they were just as far from Gothic as Fonthill—nothing more than amusing attempts at originality in an age of keen competition—and they had little influence. England went on its way copying current continental design, keeping just as closely *à la mode* as it could from across the Channel.

On the Continent, however, something real did happen shortly after the middle of the eighteenth century.

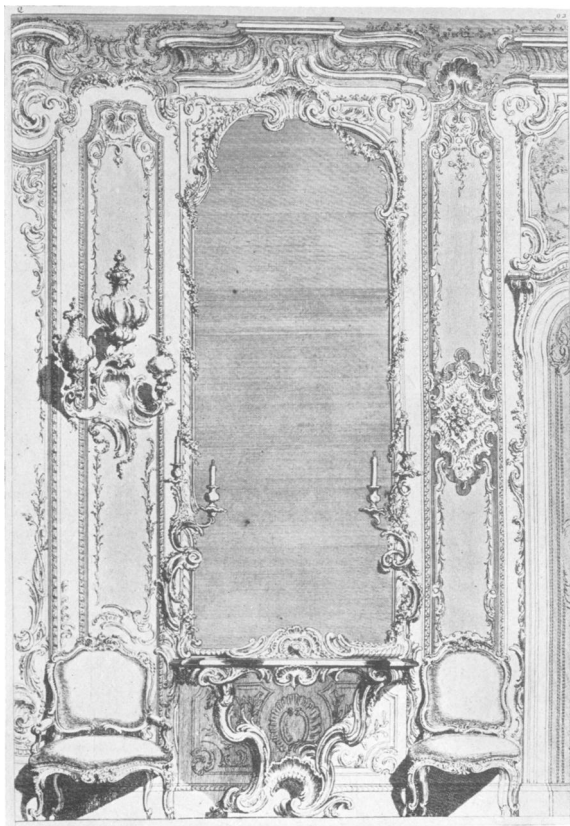
Between 1710 and 1750 Herculaneum and Pompeii were disinterred, and for the first time the world knew how the interiors of antiquity had been arranged and decorated. People took a very keen interest in these discoveries, and the architects and the designers were not slow to show their influence, Gabriel, beginning in 1751, designing the *École militaire*, the *Garde-mueble* (better known to traveling Americans as the *Hotel Crillon*), and the *Place de la Concorde*. In 1757 de Neufforge, directly inspired by the antique, published the first of his books of designs and, twenty

years ahead of time, struck out into what is now known as the Louis XVI style. About the same time were issued the color prints after the drawings of Bartoli, reproducing most of the known antique paintings. "Rome devenait à la mode," but its influence was not strong enough to do more than strongly color the traditional French scheme of things, to stiffen up from the extravagances to which the Regency under the leadership of Meissonnier had given itself. As said by Cochin in one of his attacks on the Regency men which appeared in the old *Mercur*: "It had become necessary to find a new architectural style . . . , but also it was necessary not too rudely to shock received prejudices by too suddenly producing novelties too far removed from the prevailing taste or to risk being whistled off the stage without chance of return." There was no violent break with the past, merely a natural evolution, which, however, paved the way for what was to follow.

In Rome, while the discoveries near Naples were being made, there came into being a group of ardent archaeologists, the great Wincklemann at their head, one of the most vigorous members of which was the astonishing Venetian etcher Piranesi, who, devoting his life to depicting the ruins of the grandeurs and insolences of Rome, was a great friend of Count Caylus, of Hubert Robert, and doubtless known to such another as Fragonard. Of them all he was the most headstrong, the most violent in his beliefs and actions, for he was an eighteenth-century Venetian, trained in the period in which Venice was messing with astrologers and fortune telling (the period so graphically described by Casanova in his frank revelations of the chicanery that he practised upon the senator), and he clothed all his ruins in mystery, summoning them like shadows from some vasty deep, and giving to every thing that he touched an atmosphere of incantation. Much work and almost as much controversy over his beloved ruins, for he was constrained, or better unrestrained, to defend them against the claims of the Grecians, finally produced in Piranesi the desire to create a decorative art which

should owe nothing to the moderns, which in all its details should be a resurrection of Roman art, and this obsession resulted in 1769 in the publication of his book of plates, "Divers Manners of Ornamenting Chimneys and all other Parts of Houses taken from the Egyptian, Tuscan, and

decline, and returning again to barbarism. What irregularities in columns, in architraves, in pediments, in cupolas; and above all what extravagance in ornaments! one would think that ornaments are used in works of architecture, not to embellish them, but to render them ugly." Finally



FROM OEUVRE DE JUSTE-AURELE
MEISSONNIER, PARIS, N. D. (ABOUT 1750)

Grecian Architecture with an Apologetical Essay in Defence of the Egyptian and Tuscan Architecture." Early in his Essay he says, "What I pretend by the present designs is to shew what use an able architect may make of the ancient monuments by properly adapting them to our own manners and customs. . . . The study of Architecture, having been carried by our ancestors to the highest pitch of perfection, seems now on the

after a long discussion of antique architecture Piranesi bursts out with his challenge, "The Roman school, founded upon these monuments, will continue to be the mother of good taste, and perfect design, which are the distinctive marks of her superiority over all others, and which bring such a number of hopeful youths from different nations into her bosom, there to learn the perfection of design." This book was in many respects the culminating

point in Piranesi's career; he made his proposal to sweep aside the accumulated tradition and to sit exclusively at the feet of Antiquity. In the Rome of the day, full as it was of ardently archaeologizing sojourners from everywhere, the idea took root. Piranesi's friend Clérissseau, the architect, transformed the "cellule" of Father Lesueur according to the new theory—as comic in its inception as it was ever to be—his bed the basin of a fountain, his desk a sarcophagus, his table an entablature, and capitals for his chairs; while Hubert Robert with greater restraint did some work in the new style for de Breteuil, the ambassador to Rome from Malta. The new style reached France in 1789—the very year of the Convention—when Belanger, who had succeeded to the papers of Lhuillier, a pupil of Clérissseau's, decorated the hotel of Mlle. Dervieux in the rue Chante-reine in the most thoroughgoing Piranesi. England it reached somewhat earlier, primarily through Piranesi's friendship with Clérissseau, who introduced to him Sir William Chambers and Robert Adam, whose great book, published in 1772, actually contains several plates etched by Piranesi. In both countries the antique style had a great and an immediate vogue. In England the fashion set by Adam and the amateurs of Greece and Rome had a tendency to slip back into the normal course of things English, for the tradition and the practice of the crafts remained as before, and the direction of their accumulated momentum, or perhaps was it their inertia, was not much deflected by the impact of the new ideas. But in France political events took a hand in the history of design and craftsmanship with the most momentous and unforeseeable results.

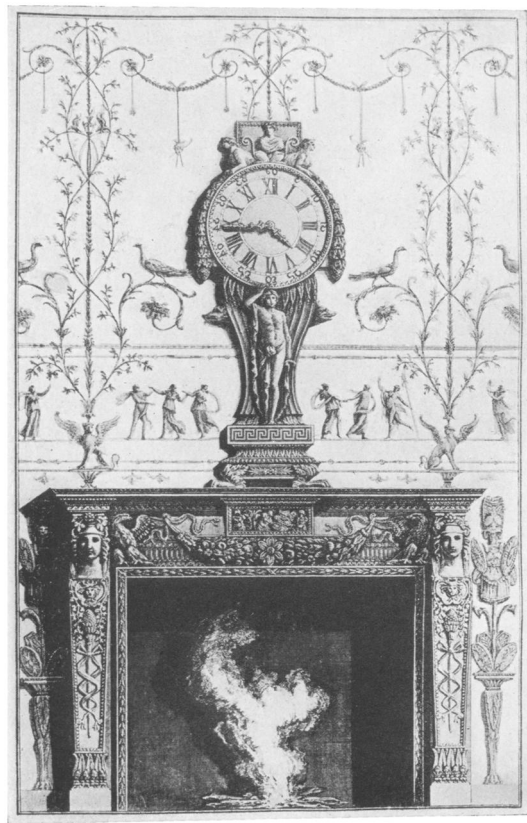
The organization of the French trades had received a most severe blow in 1776 when Louis XVI at the behest of Turgot, but so much against the will of the Parlement that he had to resort to a *lit de justice* to effect it, completely reorganized the trade guilds, their powers and personnel. In 1791 they were finally abolished and the old traditional system was thrown to the winds; the trades and professions became

free for all to practise who would. Doubtless a wise economic measure, it had the result of disrupting the organization, the training, the education, of the designers and the craftsmen, and in so doing of beginning the destruction of the tradition, running back to the Middle Ages, which by its very intensive effect had brought about such remarkable things. Then in 1793 came the débâcle—the King was beheaded and France became a republic, and with the republic came a complete change in life and fashion. The political troubles had begun in 1789, the same year that Mlle. Dervieux had her house done over in Piranesi's style, and from that time until 1796, there was little building or artistic work done in France. During those seven years the craftsmen were effectively disorganized, while the architects wandered over Europe, to Portugal and to Russia and the smaller German principalities, where their efforts were lost so far as concerned the future in England or France. There were two minor styles developed prior to the Empire, known as the Revolution and Messidor (this in vogue during the Directory and the Consulate), but they were little more than the short transitions between Louis XVI and Empire. They amounted to little because men's minds were intent upon political and economic events, the subject of the competition for the architectural prize in 1793 being "une caserne devant contenir six cents hommes de cavalerie." People from sentiment and from fear discarded what they could of the old traditional forms, and the antique, being representative of nothing resembling the old monarchical things, was adopted wholesale, so that when David, who had been trained at Rome in the time of Piranesi, came into power, he was able to promulgate as by edict the Empire style. This lasted until the end of the Napoleonic régime so far as concerned building and furnishing undertaken officially and by the newly rich, for the older generation had lapsed into quietude, glad to be allowed to live, let alone to embark upon new ventures.

The period from 1789 until 1815 was so long that when it ended a whole generation

had grown up under the tyranny of Percier and Fontaine, the fashionable Empire designers and architects, and there were left practically none of the craftsmen trained under the old traditional corporate scheme. The Empire style lasted for a while after Waterloo, but by mere impetus, dying

the old corporate restrictions which they had already achieved, but freedom to do as they wished in their own work. Moreover, they, or at least a very large and influential part of them, hated the artificiality of the old régime, its smartness, its trigness, its good manners, and they argued that it was not



FROM PIRANESI'S *DIVERS MANNERS OF ORNAMENTING CHIMNEYS*, ROME, 1769

away in the stuffy comfort of what are known today as Restoration and Louis Philippe. The Graeco-Roman had weighed upon men's minds until they were tired of its grandiosity, and, even more important, were sick of its oppressive heaviness and uniformity of style. Much as the restored monarchy would have liked, the old tradition could not be recaptured. The people wanted freedom, not only the freedom from

really French anyway, that it was a development out of Italianate sources forced upon the public from above, by the School of Fontainebleau under Francis I, by the work of LeBrun and Bernini under Louis XIV, and by the archaeologists under the Empire. They wanted to find something really French, and, as luck would have it, it was ready to hand. The spoils of all the old châteaux, of the monasteries and the

churches, were cluttering the shops and the storage places; the neo-catholic movement combined with the advent of a group of powerful scholars and students who were busy disinterring the antiquities of French literature and art, to bring about a great interest in the early glories of France. As early as 1800, Berchoux, a poor enough poet, had written:

"Qui me délivrera des Grecs et des Romains?

O vous qui gouvernez notre triste patrie,

Qu'il ne soit plus parlé des Grecs je vous supplie!

Ils ne peuvent prétendre à de plus longs succès,

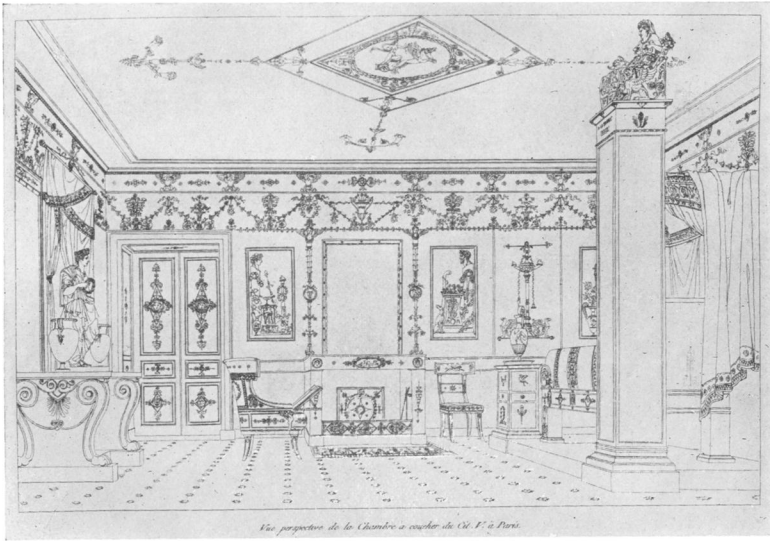
Vous serait-il égal de nous parler français."

The Romantic movement was in full swing before any one realized it—French art, the truly national expression, unspoiled by foreign influence, the art of freedom, of expression, was seen in the Gothic. And all of France that counted for the future plunged. Châteaubriand had written of the *Génie du Christianisme*, Count MacCarthy and van Praet collected the books printed upon vellum, Baron Taylor, aided by the invention of lithography, started his series of *Voyages Pittoresques en France*, and called to his aid Bonington, Isabey, and many others, for the purpose of illustrating the monuments of past time. Shakespeare and Goethe came into sudden and violent vogue, and Delacroix illustrated them with equally sudden and violent pseudo-Gothic lithographs, while Victor Hugo epitomized the movement in one sentence of his preface to *Notre Dame*—"Inspirons, s'il est possible, à la nation l'amour de l'architecture nationale." With it all came "moyen-age" chairs, tables, ceilings, windows, bindings, everything. For the first time in Europe was seen the sight of a people trying at one and the same time to turn their faces back four hundred years and to keep up with modern invention, to live and think in the *quinzième-dix-neuvième siècle*, to be *moyenageux* and to travel in steamboats and railway cars.

It really was very, very funny, an episode that had its great furies, its violent controversies, its vivid personalities, and a great deal of charm. It tried to straddle two periods utterly and fundamentally different, it had available all the loot from the great houses, and it was, thanks to the lithographic stone, for the first time in history, a people drowned in pictures, pictures of everything that the hands of Frenchmen had ever made. Such part of France as was not sodden in bourgeois comfort turned and twisted under the strain of trying to do the impossible; it built new buildings in "Gothic"—mantelpiece clock Gothic, I fear, for the most part—old buildings it restored, in ones not quite so old it inserted false floor beams, put up struts and mullions which had no functional purpose, painted its walls blue and spattered them with gold stars, sat upon beastly uncomfortable chairs with rose windows for splats—and generally made a charming ass of itself. Naturally the thing couldn't be done; valiantly as the Romantics tried, it was too much like lifting one's self by one's boot straps—the steamboat, the railroad, the daily paper were too strong, too interesting, and too essentially of the here and the now. And of course it ended in a deep-dyed pessimism—the truly French thing, the *Moyen-age* did not work, and with that discovery the people really interested in such things lost faith in themselves. New things in decoration were dangerous, and there was so much lovely old stuff, either real or to be imitated, so many charming objects and motifs that were perfectly good, which had stood the test of time, about which there could be no argument. It was Louis quince, or whatever; even, in the seventies, Japanese rooms; but in any case something with a name that disarmed criticism, that saved the necessity for thought, and above all the necessity for that frequently uncomfortably bracing exercise of having faith in one's self and doing one's own thing. The "period room," the eccentric room, the emblem of lost faith, had come to stay. Architects and decorators instead of being artists became "savants."

Somewhere Henri Havard sums up the situation, "Curious contradiction, the furnishings of the middle ages and of the renaissance were generally preferred for the dining and smoking rooms—rooms, which, for good reason, those periods did not know. Louis XIV and Louis XV were reserved for the two drawing rooms, and Louis XVI for the bed room and the boudoir. A kind of pot-pourri of various pasts, curious mixture of contradictory traditions and

country was having its distemper. They came back infected with Gothic. Prout, Turner, Nash, Pugin, Ruskin drew it, built it, preached it. But it had to wait its turn, for there was no devastating revolution in England. Finally in the seventies the teaching of the group came to a head in Sir Charles Eastlake's *Hints on Household Taste*, a book that had a tremendous vogue, and out of the frame of mind that it typified came Morris and his



FROM RECUEIL DE DÉCORATIONS INTÉRIEURES
BY PERCIER AND FONTAINE, PARIS, 1812

aspirations, and because of that the sufficiently faithful image of our political and social condition."

England for a time went on its own way, more insular than ever—after the decision at Waterloo holding its head aloft from the rest of the world, content and proud of things as they were, intent now for a little while on being as British as British could be—only, still, with a curious Wedgwood-Flaxman reflection of Piranesi-Adam-Empire. But sooner or later Yorick Britain always recognizes that in matters of style "they order these things better in France." Many of the young artists and writers went to the Continent to finish their education, and they were in France while that

satellites, valiantly preaching economics, honesty, sincerity, and art, all Gothic, with the result that this time Gothic came into its own in the houses of the aesthetic and the newly rich, sweeping them from typography to window curtains, and having as its principal result the endowment of the English-speaking world with the "Morris chair," fitting emblem of the peculiar attitude in and toward life that engendered it. In the meantime the good old English fashion of copying French fashions came to life again, the early-Victorian was impossible, the middle, if anything, worse, Punch had been a bit hard on the aesthetic school, and with the example of Hertford House and South Ken-

sington before them, the "period room" came into its own in England—as in France earlier in the century, the result of a fear of both present and future and the certainty that the old was both tried and good, even in not too intelligent reproductions.

May we of today in our own turn not go back and read Piranesi's Apologetical Essay with profit, forgetting if needs be his particular examples and concentrating our thought on some of his general principles, as expressed, for instance, in a passage such as this:

"An artist, who would do himself honour, and acquire a name, must not content himself with copying faithfully the ancients, but studying their works he ought to shew himself of an inventive, and, I had almost said, of a creating Genius; And . . . he ought to open himself a road to the finding out of new ornaments and new manners. The human understanding is not so short and limited, as to be unable to add new graces, and embellishments to the works of architecture. . . ."

The question that is before American designers and manufacturers today is, are we going to keep up the aping of the past, or have we enough vitality, enough belief in ourselves and in each other, to forge ahead and, fortified by the study of the evolution of styles, create a style of the here and the now?

W. M. I., JR.

LACE PATTERN BOOKS OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

AMONG the few precious documents that remain to us of the early days of lace-making none is more alluring to the lace collector, especially if she be a woman, than the little books of patterns published by Isabella Catanea Parasole.¹ It is befitting that a woman should have established so high a standard in a subject so essentially feminine.

In the terse phraseology of modern

¹In the *Teatro delle nobili et virtuose donne*, published in Rome in 1616, the name appears Elisabetta Catanea Parasole; in the 1597 edition, *Studio delle virtuose donne*, it is Isabetta.

biographers, Isabella Parasole "was working in Rome about 1600 and died at the age of fifty." To those of us who long for a more personal touch, to despatch so interesting a character in terms so devoid of imagination seems not only a bit heartless but inexcusable; for one is loath to picture the life of a charming woman, a contemporary of some of Italy's greatest men, as consisting merely of working and dying!

After diligent search one scribe vouchsafed the information that the lady in question was "*une femme fort adroite dans divers ouvrages qui grave aussi en bois des dessins de dentelles, ainsi que nombre de plantes pour le Prince Cesi*," three words that at once shift the mental vision from an arid waste of verbiage to the pulsating life of an Italian garden with its radiant sunshine, cooling shadows, birds and bees humming in and out among myriad blossoms. It was in such an environment that this charming work was evolved.

The illustrious prince here mentioned, the founder of the Accademia dei Lincei, was the central figure in a group of scholars who dwelt in Rome during the early years of the seventeenth century. His brilliant mind, the treasures of his library, and his far-famed botanical garden proved a center of attraction to artists, scientists, and men of letters; and in such an atmosphere the refined taste of Isabella Parasole found much that was congenial. That she came of a distinguished family may be assumed from the fact that her husband, Leonardo Norsini, assumed her name; and as both he and she were interested in botanical work, it may be that they too were members of the Academy. Norsini, it seems, came into prominence through his illustrations for the *Herbal of Castor Durante*, physician to Sixtus V, while Isabella did similar work for Prince Cesi; and the many floral patterns in her lace book were doubtless taken from nature in this very garden. However, be that as it may, it is pleasant to picture the designer of these charming plates wandering about among the blossoms of this old sixteenth-century garden selecting a freesia here, a rose or lily there, to form the theme of her patterns.